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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2008

In Today's Papers

Cheney Meets Turkish Leaders in Ankara

All media outlets report Vice President Dick Cheney met with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, and the Chief of General Staff (TGS) General Yasar Buyukanit during Cheney's second visit to Turkey in six years. According to papers, the topics addressed included terrorism, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Mainstream Sabah says Cheney asked for support against Saddam Hussein during his 2002 visit to Turkey; this time he asked Turkey to support efforts to rebuild Iraq. Cheney said U.S. presence in Iraq would continue and he stressed that Turkey's support was important to Iraq's stability. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "Cheney urged Turkey to establish ties with the Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq and he praised Turkish business investments in northern Iraq." Gul said once the PKK problem is resolved, Turkey would have no problems meeting with Iraqi Kurds. Papers report Cheney promised that U.S. cooperation in the fight against the PKK would continue. Mainstream Hurriyet reports Cheney responded to two controversial comments from U.S. generals, who recently suggested negotiations with the PKK. Cheney called such suggestions, "against U.S. policy."

Most papers, including mainstream Milliyet, mainstream Sabah, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, and mainstream Vatan, report Cheney did not ask Turkey to send combat troops to Afghanistan. However, liberal Radikal and mainstream Hurriyet claim Cheney asked Turkey to send troops to Afghanistan. Radikal says the Turkish government did not reject Cheney's demand, but rather gave the message that Turkey was ready to give all necessary support. Erdogan reportedly said Cheney did not table Afghanistan demands in their meeting. Papers report General Buyukanit said sending troops to Afghanistan would be a "state decision" and not only a military decision.

Cheney also expressed discomfort about Iran's uranium enrichment and Turkey's energy cooperation with Iran. Mainstream Milliyet reports Erdogan told Cheney Iran should work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and that the problem should be resolved in a

way easing the concerns of the international community. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Turkey did not support Cheney's demands concerning Iran.

Editorial Commentary on Cheney's Turkey Visit

"The Key Point in Turkish-American Relations"
Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet (3/25): "First of all, Cheney's request for a tte-`-tte with General Buyukanit reflects the importance Cheney places on military issues at this time. The main topics of Cheney's visit included Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and the PKK. The U.S. has requested combat troops for Afghanistan and this issue was brought up during Secretary Gates' visit to Ankara. Turkey has made its position clear based on two arguments. First, the Turkish army is preoccupied with the southeast and PKK-related operations. Second, sending Turkish troops to the combat zones in Afghanistan is not in line with NATO legalities. It is unlikely that General Buyukanit will change his opinion on this matter, even after his meeting with Cheney. The PKK issue, on the other hand, is the key issue in Turkish-American relations. Recent anti-Americanism in Turkey stemmed from the view that the U.S. was not taking enough action against the PKK. After the U.S. gave Turkey support for the recent cross border operation into northern Iraq, Turkish public opinion concerning the U.S. has improved. While it is important for the U.S. to stand with Turkey in the fight against terrorism, it is also important for the U.S. to clarify what it means by finding a 'political solution' to the Kurdish issue. Bilateral mistrust can be reshaped by the American government's approach to the fight against PKK terrorism. If the U.S. ties its support in the fight against the PKK to some vague political conditions, it is possible that public mistrust of the U.S. will increase again."

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"Cheney in Ankara"

Yilmaz Oztuna wrote in conservative Turkiye (3/25): "Cheney's short visit is very important. His messages to us and our messages to him have the potential to shape American policy in this region. It is no secret that the U.S. wants Turkey to fully comply with U.S. policy on Iran. The U.S. will bring this to Ankara's attention as a necessary condition for a successful strategic partnership. Iran is the dominant issue on Cheney's agenda. In addition, the U.S. plans to deploy missiles in Turkey after discussions at the NATO summit. While the demand for Turkish combat troops for Afghanistan's south is unacceptable, Turkey can contribute to efforts in Afghanistan's north. However, Turkey should bear in mind the consequences of being on bad terms with the U.S. The trump cards that can be played against us include the Kurdish problem, Armenian genocide claims and the PKK. Turkey is heading toward an era where internal political developments are leading toward a regime crisis. If Turkey does not cooperate with Washington, the U.S. will play its game in the region with these factors in mind."

Erdogan: Mr Cheney, are these missiles meant for defense?

Cheney: Yes Mr. Tayyip, Bingo! I hope we are not too late for your party closure case.

Hurriyet front page, March 25, 2008

The 'Ergenekon' Investigation Continues

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others continue coverage of the "Ergenekon" investigation. The investigation is focused on the possible ties between the shadowy "deep state" terrorist organization and figures from the bureaucracy, military, and academia. The investigation began when security forces seized explosives and weapons in an Istanbul house in June 2007. The "Ergenekon" network allegedly sought to create chaos through various terror attacks, including plans to murder Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk and plans to overthrow the ruling AKP government in 2009.

On Friday, Ilhan Selcuk, columnist of leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, Dogu Perincek, the leftist-nationalist Workers' Party leader, and Kemal Alemdaroglu, former rector of Istanbul University,

were taken into custody. Selcuk and Alemdaroglu were released on Sunday, but Perincek remains in custody because police allegedly found plans for an attack against the Court of Appeals in his computer. Perincek was charged with being a high-level leader of the Ergenekon terrorist organization as well as holding confidential documents about the state. Ilhan Selcuk was accused of being the intellectual leader of the Ergenekon network. Selcuk criticized the detentions in today's Cumhuriyet, saying the real targets of the probe are the judiciary and the army.

AKP and Labor Unions Agree on Social Security Bill

All papers report Social Security Minister Faruk Celik said on Monday an IMF-sought social security bill will be presented to parliament this week for approval after a partial agreement with labor unions. Celik said the AKP government and labor unions agreed on setting a threshold for blue-collar employees to retire at 7,200 working days instead of the current threshold of 7,000 days. The government had previously set a target of 9,000 working days but had to ease the requirement due to recent strikes and criticisms from unions and opposition parties. No agreement was reached on a key part of the package, which seeks to raise the retirement age to 65. In Turkey, the current retirement age for men is 48 and for women is 44; retirement at 65 would be introduced after 2036.

AKP Works on Constitutional Reforms; TUSIAD Issues Warning against Polarization

Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Vatan, Zaman and others: Mainstreams Sabah and Milliyet quote AKP deputy chairman Nihat Ergun

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as saying "by the end of this week the AKP might present constitutional amendments to the parliament to protect political parties from closure." Ergun noted that they want compromise under the roof of parliament. If that doesn't happen, then a nationwide referendum is an option. Mainstream Milliyet reports that MHP, which has been working on a constitutional amendment to protect political parties from closure, suggested amending article 69 and 183. If MHP's amendment is accepted, 71 AKP members, including PM Erdogan, will face a life-time ban from politics versus the five-year ban demanded by the Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor.

Meanwhile, all papers report that Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD) issued a statement saying, "constitutional amendments prepared in a hasty manner in order to overcome daily problems will only deepen Turkey's problems." TUSIAD urged the government to focus on welfare and peace, and to avoid interpreting democracy through majority rule and a narrow political understanding.

Nevruz Protests Continue

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Zaman, Cumhuriyet and others: Papers report that post-Nevruz tensions have resulted in new clashes between protesters and security forces. This time, clashes in Yuksekova broke out during the funeral of Ikbâl Yasar, who was killed during clashes with security forces during Nevruz. There were protests in Van as well. Hurriyet reports that shopkeepers in Hakkari, Yuksekova and Semdinli remained closed due to fears of unrest. Meanwhile, the police made an official announcement, "during Nevruz celebrations in Turkey, 176 demonstrations were held, two people died, 187 people were injured, and 653 people were detained."

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- On Monday, Turkmenistan's Head of State Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedov met with President Gul in Ankara during an official visit.

- Pro-Kurdish DTP MP Pervin Buldan faces investigation for praising crime and inciting propaganda in a speech she delivered in Igdir during Nevruz celebrations.

- Turkey invites local and foreign companies to bid on the construction of the country's first nuclear-power plant.

International News

- Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias told CNN-Turk television they were ready to accept a bi-zonal federation based on political equality.
- In a new audiotape released Monday, al-Qaeda No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahiri encouraged Muslims to attack Jewish and American targets in response to Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip.
- Yousaf Raza Gilani, a former parliament speaker and aide to murdered opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, has become Pakistan's next prime minister.

WILSON